



Women street sweepers c1916 – 168.16

Cambridge REFUSE COLLECTION Chronicle, by Mike Petty

Stories about Refuse Collection and Street Sweeping from Cambridge Newspapers 1907 to 1990

1897

1897 05 07

Will you allow me a small space to refer to the arrangements for sweeping and cleaning Fitzroy Street? After one gets one's place thoroughly cleaned and dusted, ready for business, we have three men commence sweeping the street and it is impossible sometimes to see across the road for dust. After this is done and the cart takes the rubbish away the water cart makes its appearance about two hours later. Considering that Fitzroy-street is one of the busiest streets of Cambridge I think these things could be altered to the benefit of the tradespeople of the street - letter from "Shopkeeper 1897 05 07

1901

1901 03 08

Miss W—of Regent Street, Cambridge was summoned for causing an obstruction by leaving some refuse tins in the street. P.C. Cole said he saw the tins outside her premises at 10.11 pm and they were still there at one o'clock the next morning. She said she placed the rubbish outside overnight because the scavenger came so early in the morning – 6.35am - before she was up. The Chief Constable said something had to be done to stop the practice of putting pails of rubbish out overnight. The defendant was cautioned and dismissed 01 03 08

1902

1902 04 18

Sir – may I call attention to an almost intolerable nuisance that maintains on Mill Road, Cambridge. The shopkeepers are in the habit of sweeping the refuse from their establishments into the streets (especially on Saturday night) with the result that dirty paper is blown about the streets and into the gardens of private houses. It is most objectionable and annoying to have one's gardens and yards filled with rubbish of this description. Is it not an offence against the bye-laws? – Resident 02 04 18 c

1902 03 03

Sir - Cambridge Corporation has its roads cleaned between the hours of eight in the morning and five in the evening. As soon as the roads become busy a one-horse sweeping machine makes its appearance and begins to sweep the mud from the centre of the road to within three inches of the kerb, and there leaves it for 36 hours. By that time the public have removed it on their clothes, or it has been splashed on the front of adjoining houses, or else the Corporation employ a few boys to sweep it into nice heaps which they leave at some place that it is convenient for the public to step into. But should there by any chance be any left the Corporation kindly send two men and a cart to remove it –
Grateful Ratepayer 02 03 03

1904

1904 05 09

The Association of Managers of Sewage Disposal Works inspected the Cambridge pumping station destructors where all kinds of refuse turned out from households daily, sweepings and other undesirable matter is tipped into huge trucks and burnt, giving off heat used whose steam is used to pump sewage. During winter months some 40 tons of refuse is burned each day. The disinfecter was examined with interest; it was installed in 1902 and during the smallpox of 1904 was of great service in disinfecting a great number of articles using super-heated steam. They then moved to the Corporation sewage farm, Milton Road, for a practical demonstration of sewerage analysis
04 05 09

1906

1906 04 19

The Borough Surveyor bought a new watering van at a cost of £52. They had 11 vans but four were unfit to travel as the wheels would not go round. With the sudden arrival of hot weather there was not one fit for use. They should have been overhauled at the end of the season. But scavenging in two districts had been let out to contractors and the vans belonging to the council were in their hands. 06
04 19b

1909

1909 12 17

It is highly desirable that the footways should be kept clean and it may come as news to many that there is a bye-law which requires occupiers of any premises fronting or adjoining any street to cleanse the adjoining footways and pavements at least once every day, when necessary, excepting Sunday. The Chief Constable has been informed so Cambridge householders had better look out in future.
CWN 09 12 17

1910

1910 01 29

Description of road sweeper at work [1.21]

1910 07 09

Water cart drivers turn off the supply when passing cyclists [1.22]

1911

1911 06 10

Byelaw proposed that refuse must be placed in galvanised receptacles, feel tenants might use them for wheelbarrows, coal scuttles or to give babies baths; cost high, byelaw with drawn [1.5,4.1]

1911 06 16

Every house should be furnished with a proper metal refuse container. At present all sorts of receptacles – pails, wooden boxes, tin pans etc – were stuck on the edge of pavements, without covers, so that the wind and dogs scattered their contents about the streets and children picked over the rubbish. In hot weather the refuse lay exposed to sun, fermenting, decaying and attracting swarms of flies. But who would provide for the damage done to receptacles: the dust carts were so high that

dustmen had to throw them up to a man on top to catch as best he could. Wooden boxes would be cheaper and could be burnt in the destructor 11 06 16f

1913

1913 04 26

“In De Freville men collect rubbish from the back of the house, in poorer areas people need to take it to the front” [1.23]

1913 02 14

PC Law said he was on duty in Hills Road when he noticed the pavements outside no.36 were in a filthy condition: there were pools of water and refuse lying about. He’s asked the occupant to clean them up, but the man had refused. The bye-law said occupiers should cleanse the footway adjoining their property once a day. But this had taken place at 9.10 am and that was too early; there was no evidence it was not clean at 10 o’clock. The case was dismissed. 14 02 14 p9 CIP

1917

1917 02 14

Women Scavengers. The following is an extract from the minutes of the Paving (etc.) Committee which will come before the Cambridge Town Council, tomorrow. The chairman reported that Mrs. Keynes, Chairman of the Advisory Committee for Women's War Employment, had suggested that some of the workmen employed by the Corporation might be released for National Service and the scavenging of the streets be carried out by women. The Borough Surveyor explained that he had placed no obstacle in the way of the men going, but he had not pressed any men to go. The Committee approved the action taken by the Borough Surveyor. 17 02 14 CIPof

1918

1918 01

Council buy 2 electric & 2 motor vehicles to collect refuse due to difficulties in getting horses & drivers [1.6]

1918 04 03

Women are now employed by the Cambridge Corporation as street scavengers and are performing the duties very capably, too 18 04 03 CIPof

1918 07 10

Uniformed Women Scavengers. A notable feature of Cambridge streets is the women scavengers, who are now turned out in a smart uniform. They are doing their work in a very capable fashion, and keep the thoroughfares wonderfully spick and span 18 07 10 CIPof

1918 11 13

Corporation Motor Lorry for house refuse collecting and general haulage. The body was built on to a Ford chassis at the Corporation Works Department, Mill Road 18 11 13 CIPof

1919

1919 01

New Council dust cart damaged by fire [1.8]

1923

1923 06 16

A remarkable story of how a large sum of money was snatched from the jaws of death, as typified by the corporation refuse destructor reached me the other day. It appears that a certain tradesman on Peas Hill, Cambridge, had by some strange mischance consigned a wallet containing money to the dustbin. A frenzied telephone message to the contractor revealed that one of his dustcarts had collected at the address that day. The cart was searched, but without success. Eventually the missing wallet was discovered on the very threshold of destruction and found to contain Treasury notes to the value of

between £200 and £300. Some people back Derby winners and others have luck in other directions 23
06 16 [1.20]

1925

1925 04 21

The borough surveyor reported that the reconstruction of the cells at the refuse destructor had been completed and it was now taking all the town's refuse. Under the old system there were three "topmen" and six "shovellers" employed to feed the cells, now no shovellers were necessary and all men were doing similar work. He recommended they should be called "chargers" and should all receive the same amount of pay 25 04 21

1925 10 26

Sir – in the course of clearing the refuse from the household dustbins the employees now have instructions to sort out all empty fish, fruit and other tins from the refuse and leave them behind for the householder to dispose of how he may. This regulation may not be a hardship for those who have a spacious garden where they can dig a hole and bury their tins. But we, the ratepayers of Petersfield Ward, blessed with councillors who have suggested homes in the fields for our poultry, ask them in their wisdom to be good enough to provide us with a home for our empty tins – A.M. Morley 25 10 26

1927

1927 10 04

A motor road sweeper and street cleaner was demonstrated in Jesus Lane, Cambridge. The makers claim it has a small capital outlay, low operating costs, small turning circle and ease of control. The brush can be lifted when not in use and sprays fitted to damp down dust in hot weather. The machine worked over 150 yards of road which had been specially covered with a layer of refuse. It showed a fine turn of speed - with the brush not in use it can do 20 mph - and the rubbish was quickly and neatly removed to the gutters. Compared with the horse sweeper now used it is much superior. 27 10 04

1927 10 26

Cambridge councillors spent a couple of hours observing the capabilities of another motor road sweeper, the "Karrier" Patent Road Sweeper, Sprinkler and Collector". It was first tried in Jesus Lane where a large quantity of newly fallen plane tree leaves were thickly scattered about the roadway and had drifted to a depth of four inches. A quantity of road sweepings had also been laid and pressed down firmly by passing traffic. Some of this and patches of horse droppings proved very difficult to remove and the large leaves presented a serious problem. A great quantity of the leaves was removed and lifted into the tipping truck at the back of the vehicle but some of the leaves spun round with the brush and were deposited on the roadway again behind it. 27 10 26

1929

1929 01

Corporation purchase Shelroke & Drewry refuse vehicle [2.1]

1929 03 16

Whilst shaving the other morning I caught sight for the first time of one of the brand new motor dust waggons and called other members of the household to see it. "Freighters" is the correct word for them and they have the reputation for being dustless loaders and more hygienic generally. There are four openings each side with sliding covers so that everything is closed in & when the men are on the way back to the destructor with their load there is none of that unsightly mass of paper and rubbish above the loading line with which we have been familiar in years gone by. Altogether a great improvement. 29 03 16

1929 01 12

Sir – The Cambridge Surveyor offers to supply ‘Standard Bins’ at 4s. 9d and limit the amount of refuse. These are certainly tidy but judging from the state of some of the bins one feels that potential disease forces lurk under the lids, especially on murky warm nights. The advantages of the old wooden box or tub is that when the bacteria and damp have done their work the said container perforce refuses refuse – I.M. Tired. Editor: I believe the sanitary dustbins are infinitely preferable to the old wooden boxes without lids that often decorate our pavements and provide a happy hunting ground for stray dogs. 29 01 12

1929 10 05

Some authorities have been recovering useful matter from old tin cans and something could be done in Cambridge. Soft metal articles – tubes and tinfoil – are already collected by the authorities of Addenbrooke’s and there are persons who collect bottles and jars. But tinned articles seem not to be regarded as anything but mere waste. A start on a small scale would need hardly any capital but how to dispose of it is the problem. CDN 5.10.1929

1937

1937 01 21

Sir – Cambridge’s dustbins are insanitary. Until late in the morning they decorate the edges of the pavements and their ugly and battered forms render the streets hideous. But worst of all, they stay there without lids, old tin baths, bent and dented zinc tubs, even cardboard boxes, all filled with garbage, scattering their dust and filth in the winds. In summer they stew in the hot sun. In winter they lie open to the bleak rain and drip their dust and ashes on the pavement. Babies have to run the risk of dust and infection in the streets while mothers at home strive to keep them protected from germs. Can nothing be done? – A maternity nurse 37 01 21c

1938

1938 04 20

Millions of tons of refuse have been tipped into the disused blue gault pit belonging to Messrs Watts and Son in Newmarket Road during the past 35 years. The Corporation and innumerable householders have dumped their rubbish there until an area of nearly two and a half acres has been filled to a depth of fifty feet. Now the tipping has got to stop. There is a grave danger that, in the event of a heavy rainstorm, part of the area filled in will be carried over a slender barrier and encroach upon the adjoining pit being worked by the Cambridge Brick Company. The blue gault is used for making bricks for the majority of local houses and is the best wearing material because of its remarkable durability. 38 04 20a

1939

1939 11 02

The Corporation want to construct a refuse-dump at Swann’s brickyard, Newmarket Road. Their destructor could only incinerate two-thirds of the town’s refuse and the remainder disposed of by controlled tipping. It was a deep disused clay pit and brick-making works and when filled a good part of the area could be added to Stourbridge Common. There were houses only on one side and it was quite remote. There would be a seven-foot high screen around the pit and the estimated life of the tip was ten years 39 11 02b

1940

1940 04 19

Waste material collects in Cambridge being compressed at Newmarket Road dump & turned into handy bales – photo – 40 04 19a

1947

1947 04 08

Sir, I am interested in the letter of H.O. Fleming on the collection of refuse. The only way to have the old dustbin removed is to see the dustmen personally and make a suitable arrangement with them. I have had to do this myself and have found them very civil and helpful. The dustmen are highly

selective and seem to go through the bins carefully, taking out anything they do not fancy and strewing it about. They also batter the bin out of shape very quickly and in may case leave it some distance away from where it is placed outside my premises. Now that we have provided cars for officials they might perhaps get around a little and see what is being done (letter from J.R.Partington, Maids Causeway, Cambridge) 47 04 08

1947 09 29

Sir - A dustman's wage is £3.16s.0d a week, irrespective of loads or journeys. I wonder if your readers would like to try this job for a while. They would then find out the discomforts which are a dustman's lot. He mustn't mind when lifting a bin if water and filth trickle down his neck through a hole; he mustn't mind if somebody puts some acid in a bin which when emptied sprays on one's clothes and burns holes in them (these are not replaced). One pair of overalls a year is the limit. Each motor is given a district and that has to be cleared, and if the dust and smell should make him feel ill he must just carry on. With all this we are expected to sort all the paper from the dirt. If all householders kept it separate it would be different. Critics should try on a windy day, emptying a bin that has been crammed full. It is impossible to to it without some dropping but if the loaders top to pick it up every time, the driver would be in the next street" - a Dustman 47 09 29

1948

1948 06 18

Strong protests with regard to the filling of the tip opposite the Gasworks in Newmarket Road were voiced at Cambridge Town Council and it was recommended that a corrugated iron fence be erected along the whole of the frontage to Newmarket Road. Moving an amendment requiring owners to remove "the existing barrier of motor bodies", Councillor Gilbert said that residents had complained about the smell and inconvenience caused by the owners putting a number of dismantled motor bodies along the frontage. Coun. Cutting said there was filth, disease and "the most unsightly heap of rubbish you have ever seen in England" at this place and it was increasing day by day 48 06 18

1950

1950 01 11

Mr Owen Duce of Scrapbanks works, Newmarket Road, Cambridge, told an inquiry that he used the pit for dumping waste from his scrap business & also accepted other materials such as brick rubble and old wire, but no domestic rubbish which might give rise to vermin or the risk of fire. He has recently erected a high steel fence along the road frontage. It has already resulted in the production of 4,000 tons of scrap for steel works besides valuable quantities of platinum for export 50 01 11

1952

1952 01 02

After Monday wash day it's Tuesday bucket-and-shovel day for the women of the Cambridge's Queen Street, or Dustmen's Folly as it has been re-named by the residents. Tuesday is the day when the dustcart calls to empty the conglomeration of tin cans, ashes, kitchen waste and other refuse. Every Tuesday morning as regularly as clockwork 20 housewives place 20 dustbins on the pavements for the dustmen to empty. Promptly at mid-day the dust-cart hoves in sight and the contents are emptied into the cart with a liberal application for the road as well. And 20 housewives wait for the metallic clang that is the signal for them to go into action with brushes, buckets and shovels to clear up the mess the dustmen leave behind – for the street is in a worse state than it was before they called. And so seldom is a street cleaner to be seen that to the majority of the residents he is a legendary figure, though Mrs Fry who runs a little general stores does claim to have seen the Abominable Dustman 52 01 02

1960s *The Cambridgeshire Collection has detailed newspaper cuttings files from this date*

1960

1960 01 23

Refuse collection comes in for a good deal of criticism. Visitors are shocked and ashamed by the exhibition of dustbins on the pavements and the trails of garbage left by the lorries on dustbin day. The old and infirm feel it is a strain and an imposition to lift or drag their bins to the kerb. But it is hard work for the dustmen and three-wheeled bases to fit the standard bins may be supplied to help both. It is illegal to put garden refuse in a dustbin but this will be collected separately for a modest charge. Very little rubbish, other than offal, is burned. Paper is sold, other rubbish sorted and the bulk of solid waste tipped into worked-out brick fields. It is then covered with earth and the land will eventually be reclaimed for recreational purposes. 60 01 23

1960 04 29

For most people sweeping the roads would be a boring and wholly irksome task. But to Arthur Morgan, who has done it for 20 years, it is always interesting and occasionally exciting with ample scope for meeting people. Arthur, a sprightly man of 63 was once an army sniper but now sweeps the Market Square twice a day though he dislikes having to dodge the traffic. Cinema queues shed a quantity of litter which he carts away in his barrow without complaint. He has come across many items of values including rings, watches and on one occasion a car bonnet! 60 06 03a

1960 The news that part of the worked-out British Portland Cement clay pits at Cherry Hinton are to be used as a Corporation rubbish dump have aroused opposition. There had to be some better way of getting rid of refuse than putting it in a pit. It would take 25-30 years to get it filled and unless every cartload of rubbish was immediately covered with earth it would become rat-infested. But other pits had been reclaimed: Herbert Robinson's garage in Newmarket Road was built entirely on a filled-in pit. 60 04 29

1962

1962 01 19

Radioactive waste materials with a short life, from University departments, can be buried under six feet of earth at the Cambridge rubbish dump off Newmarket Road. There were concerns that children might dig it up before the radioactivity had dropped or rats might become contaminated and spread it around. Dangers might also arise if a fire broke out on the dump or if some of the material got into sewers or drains. Councillors recommend the waste, wrapped in plastic, should be delivered by University vehicles and buried after strict safety checks have been observed by University officials. 62 01 19

1962 09 28

The last resting place of many Cambridge vehicles is Rich's yard off Coldham's Lane. To this graveyard of motor vehicles come hundreds of cars and lorries worn out with old age or cut off in the prime of life through accidents. If they are of a type still running on the highway they are stripped of anything that might be transferred to a similar vehicle. So the yard is a mass of broken bodies and skeleton parts, old shafts, old springs and old engines. The bodies are broken up further and sent away for export, mainly to Japan where they are crushed and melted down. 62 09 28

1962 10 05

Rag and metal merchant Ronald Arber of Newmarket Road says rags are still in great demand. He receives as much as six tons a week often brought in by children during the holidays and when the Midsummer Fair is being held, so that they can get a few more coppers to spend. They are baled up and sent to a London merchant where they are sorted into various categories and used for such things as cleaning materials and roofing felt. Considerable quantities are exported to Italy. Metals are similarly sorted. Lead is delivered to London mills to be made into lead piping, roofing materials and the lead bricks used at atomic power stations, such as Harwell. The demand for iron and steel has decreased in the past few years both at home and abroad. Most metal merchants are finding they can get more scrap iron and steel than they are able to sell. Bones, which used to provide an extremely good trade, no longer interest Mr Arber because the glues for which they were used are now made from other substances. Much of the material comes from the public. They bring their odds and ends in all the time: bed rails, gardening tools, bicycles, brass pots, radiators, car batteries, mangles, even refrigerators and fish-frying ranges along with aluminium saucepans and kettles. Jumble sale left-

overs also provide a source of trade. An electric guillotine cuts as many of the items as possible into short lengths for easy transportation. After pressing, melting and recasting at other factories, it is surprising how many of these waste articles find their way back into the home. Looking at a rag and metal merchant's premises is like looking at a wilderness of destruction. But there is order in the wilderness and every item has its place. The firm has been established for 40 years and he is confident it will remain for many years to come 62 10 05a

1962 12 17

Rubbish from the corporation tip in Coldham's Lane was spread over a wide area by the gales on Saturday; gardeners were littered with paper and other refuse. But residents claim this is nothing new: "We get smells in our houses, flies and rats frequently visit us and the floors are covered with dust each morning; and these nuisances all come from the rubbish pit", one claims. 62 12 17b

1964

1964 10 12

Mill Road shift workers say dustbins left in darkened streets are a menace and danger. Residents drag their dustbins into the street ready for an early collection. But at midnight all the street lights go out and people bump into them in the blackness of dreadful dustbin alleys. Elderly people say refuse collectors could take bins from the rear of their homes. But this would mean dustmen going through their houses. 64 10 12a

1964 11 12

Cambridge council launched a pilot scheme to test the reactions of householders to putting their refuse in paper sacks instead of the traditional dustbins. There are various faults: it will not be possible to put hot ashes or wet refuse such as potato peelings in the bags. And there is the question of cost: it seems the paper bag scheme could prove more expensive. Meetings have taken place with various paper sack manufacturers to discuss the types of refuse bag now available. 64 11 12

1965

1965 01 20

Plan to build shopping centre with parking for 1,000 cars at Duce's Pit may be blocked if council acquire adjacent site – inquiry – 65 01 20a; photo – 65 01 22a

1970

1970 04 01

Richard Duce took over Coldham's Lane site in 1948 after a brickyard closed and since then recovered 23,000 tons of copper and aluminium from scrap metal' has sold most site to London property company for new trading estate; to demolish chimney and move to bottom of the site between railway line & Newmarket Road – 70 04 01

1971

1971 02 04

Refuse disposal problems as cement works pits fill up, plans for pulverisation plant at Cheddar's Lane – 71 02 04

1972

1972 04 12

Hundreds of seagulls are leaving their mark on Cherry Hinton. But the people who live there are not impressed and have asked Cambridge councillors to start a clean-up campaign in the area. The seagulls live on the refuse tip at Coldham's Lane where the pickings are good. But they do not confine their activities to the waste ground and have started to make themselves felt on the residents. And this has upset the housewives who have told the councillors that they prefer their white washing to stay that way. Some residents have referred these problems dropped on them unexpectedly from the heights to the council's Conservative leader, Ald Stanley Bowles. Today he admitted "I just don't know what we can do about the problem. Perhaps we should issue the seagulls with nappies 72 04 12

1972 09 21

A rubbish-filled claypit off Coldham's Lane, Cambridge, bought by a firm of London property developers less than four years ago for little more than £100,000, has just been resold for £300,000 without a single building being put on it. The former claypit was filled with rubbish in the late 1940s before being bought by Mr Richard Duce in 1948 for "a matter of a few pence". In the mid-1960s attempts were made to build a shopping centre on the site but these fell through. Then at the end of 1968 Summerfield Developments bought the seven-acre block with an option on the remaining seven. Plans were announced to build warehouses but these in turn fell through. Now the land has been bought by J. Coral Estates, another firm of London developers at around £40,000 an acre. Coral also intend building warehouses 72 09 21

1975

1975 03 19

Cambridge city council will drop its controversial waste paper collection experiment next week after losing almost £1,800 of ratepayers' money on the project. Now they intend to encourage voluntary bodies to organise their own collections. More than eight tonnes of waste paper were collected during the first week but the average had now dropped to below five tonnes. In addition the price which they obtained had dropped from £18 to only £14 a tonne 75 03 19

1978

1978 10 28

The Cambridge rubbish tip at Coldham's Lane, which has been frequently criticised on windy days for its smells and the large amount of paper blown from it, is to close. But the tip which is now full up will be replaced by a massive hole in the ground just a few hundred yards away at the worked-out quarry by the side of the Norman Cement Works, where the city's refuse will continue to be dumped. In time there will be a special section for household waste like old furniture and garden waste not normally collected by dustmen. It is expected the new tip will last about five years after which rubbish will be carted to a new tip at Milton. 78 10 28

1984

1984 11 12

Pilot scheme paper sacks rather than bins [3.9]

1985

1985 05 10

Messrs Richard Larkinson Ltd has warehouses and sidings equipped with modern lifting equipment at Station Works, Hills Road to load non-ferrous metal direct on rail wagons. The family originated in Biggleswade dealing in rabbit skins then diversified into household rags using imported labour from the London area. Richard Larkinson started his business in Baldock in 1958, establishing a branch at Cottenham in 1972. Today they purchase and process all grades of scrap and export to Germany in their own company vehicles, returning with wine for their associated company, Fen Vinters Ltd. 85 05 10

1988

1988 11 04

The dustmen leave the depot at 6.10 am and begin collecting bins, cracking jokes and shouting good-natured abuse at each other. Each man is almost trotting between houses, often lifting bins on to a shoulder with one hand while grabbing bulging plastic sacks with the other. David, a veteran of 15 years, drives the dustcart a few yards at a time; too far and they would carry the bins further than necessary, too little and they waste precious minutes waiting for him. They have incentives to get the work done quickly – they knock off as soon as they are finished 88 11 04b & c

1989

1989 01 12

“Wheelie bin” system to be extended whole city, from Sept. 2012. CEN 12.1.89 25.4.89